



# Interview Techniques

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A Maricopa Workforce Connections Career Center Workshop

*Excerpts from MWC's Workshop Handout*

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# Five Common Types of Interview Questions:

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**Informational** – seeks to determine your knowledge of an area or asks for information:

- “To what does the Fair Labor Standards Act pertain?”
- “Tell us how you prepared for this position.”
- “Tell us about your computer experience.”

**Point of View** – seeks your opinion about something:

- “Do you agree with the adage, “The customer is always right?”
- “Why or why not?”
- “Describe the best supervisor you have ever worked for or observed.”

**Situational** – presents a hypothetical situation:

- “You are working outside alone on a small job filling potholes on a county road. A nearby resident comes to you with a concern about county policy relating to road repairs and your work. He is angry and claims he saw you at the same location last week spilling asphalt all over his driveway and not caring to clean it up. What would you do?”

**Behavioral** – asks what you actually did in a past life situation:

- “Tell us about a time when you had a good idea at work and you presented it to your supervisor or your co-workers. What was the idea? How did you present it to them? Was it implemented? Why or why not?”

**Simulation** – puts you in a role-playing situation:

- “Pretend you have been hired and are working as a nursing assistant. I am a mother visiting my son in the hospital and I refuse to leave when you tell me that visiting hours are over. But it is your job to make sure visitors are gone at the appointed time. I will begin the role play...”
- “You are to pretend that the scenes you are about to see on the videotape are happening right now in front of you. You are involved in these scenes, and you are to respond to them when the monitor prompts you...”



## Examples of Typical Interview Questions:

Employer's Questions	Employer's Fear Behind Question	The Point You Try to Get Across	Phrases You Might Use to Get This Across
<b>"Tell me about yourself."</b>	The employer is afraid he/she is not going to conduct a very good interview by failing to ask the right questions. Or is afraid there is something wrong with you, and is hoping you will blurt it out.	You are a good employee, as you have proven in the past at your jobs. (Give brief history about yourself, such as skills, strengths, and kind of work you have enjoyed the most to date.) <b><i>Keep it to 2 minutes max!!</i></b>	In describing your past work history, use any honest phrases you can that are self-complimentary: "Hard worker", "Came in early, left late", "Always did more than what was expected of me." Etc.
<b>"What kind of work are you looking for?"</b>	The employer is afraid that you are looking for a different job than that which the employer is trying to fill. (i.e. He/she wants a secretary, but you want to be an office manager, etc.)	You are looking for precisely the kind of work the employer is offering, (but do not say it if it is not true!) Repeat back to the employer, in your own words, what he/she has said about the job, and emphasize the skills you have to do it.	If the employer hasn't described the job at all, say, "I would be happy to answer that, but first I need to understand exactly what kind of work this job involves." <b><i>Then</i></b> answer, as at left.
<b>"Have you ever done this kind of work before?"</b>	The employer is afraid you do not possess the necessary skills and experience to do this job.	You have skills that are transferable from prior experiences (personal and professional) and you did it well.	"I pick up information and skills very quickly." "I have quickly mastered any job I have ever done."
<b>"Why did you leave your last job?"...or "How did you get along with your former boss and co-workers?"</b>	He/she is afraid you don't get along well with people, especially bosses, and is just waiting for you to 'bad-mouth' your previous boss or co-workers, as proof of that.	Say any positive things you can about your boss and co-workers. Don't lie! If you had a problem with a former boss or co-worker emphasize the positive actions you took in an attempt to resolve the differences or conflict in the work environment. If you had a bad prior work experience, focus on positive points of learning you walked away or skills you acquired while on the job.	"My boss and I both felt I would be happier in a job where I could use my skills in... (describe your strong points, such as creativity, leadership, organization skills). Or discuss how you left for educational reasons or career advancement opportunities."  "I realized that this job was not a good match for me. I enjoy interacting with people and this last job did not give me the opportunity to have much interaction with others."

<p><b>“How might your health affect your ability to do this job?”</b> or <b>“How much were you absent from work during your last job?”</b></p>	<p>The employer is afraid you will be absent from work a lot, if they hire you.</p>	<p>You will not be absent. If you have a health problem, you want to emphasize that it is one which will not keep you from being at work daily. Your productivity, compared to other worker’s is excellent.</p>	<p>If you were not absent a lot at your last job: “I believe it is an employee’s job to show up every work day. Period.” If you were absent a lot, say why, and stress that it was due to a difficulty that is now past.</p>
<p><b>“Can you explain why you have been out of work so long?”</b> or <b>“Can you tell me why there are these gaps in your work history?”</b></p>	<p>The employer is afraid that you are the kind of person who quits a job the minute you do not like something about it.</p>	<p>You love to work, and you regard times when things are not going well as challenges, which you enjoy learning how to conquer.</p>	<p>“During the gaps in my work record, I was... studying/doing volunteer work/researching career opportunities”</p>
<p><b>“Wouldn’t this job represent a step down for you?”</b> or <b>“I think this job would be way beneath your talents and experience.”</b> Or <b>“I think you are over-qualified for this position.”</b></p>	<p>The employer is afraid you could command a bigger salary somewhere else, and will therefore leave him/her as soon as something better turns up.</p>	<p>You will stick with this job as long as you and the employer agree this is where you should be.</p>	<p>“This job is not a step down for me. It will give me the opportunity to use the skills I love to use (explain the skills that you can use in the job)”.</p> <p>“Because of my previous work experience in this area, my learning curve should be relatively short. This will allow me to be very productive, cost effective hire in a short period of time.”</p> <p>“I like to work, and I give my best to every job I have ever had.”</p> <p>“I find I never get bored on a job. There is always an opportunity to learn new things and grow professionally.”</p>

<b>“Tell me, what is your greatest weakness?”</b>	The employer is afraid you have some character flaw, and hopes you will now rashly blurt it out, or confess it.	You have limitations just like everyone else but you work constantly to improve yourself and be a more and more effective worker.	Mention something you are working on improving or that has a positive aspect. “I do not like to be over-supervised, because I have a great deal of initiative, and I like to anticipate problems before they even arise.”
<b>“Why do you want to work for this company?...in this line of work?”</b>	The employer is afraid you will take the job until a better opportunity comes along, or that you are just looking for a job—any job.	You need to demonstrate that you researched the company and chose to apply for good reasons. Be sure you know about the company and the position.	This should not be that this is a large company or safe job. It should relate to your career future, something that you have wanted to get into. Show interest in the job, that you are impressed with the company’s credentials.
<b>“Do you mind if I ask, are you a smoker?”</b>	This is a very serious question—from two viewpoints: Health factor – will you insist on smoking against everyone else’s wishes. Cost factor – He/she is not too impressed with the person who leaves their desk five or ten times a day for a smoke.	You will not create problems for the employer or with your co-workers. You are a considerate, easy-to-get-along-with employee -- and a healthy employee!	“I tolerate smoking, but I appreciate a smoke-free environment.”
<b>“How do you work under pressure?” “Why do you think you will be a valuable employee?” How long do you think you will stay with the company?”</b>	Employer doubts his/her ability to select the best candidate for the position. He/she is looking for assurances – reasons to hire you/or not hire you. He/she has been burned before, and it is a very expensive situation.	Yes, you work well under pressure and meet deadlines successfully. Name your skills and experience. Show you are a quick learner. The employer is looking for longevity.	“I prioritize my work on a daily basis so I complete all tasks on time and with no errors”. “As long as there is mutual interest on both sides, I plan to be with this company as long as possible!” “I would be a valuable employee for this company because I...(site how your experience, skills, talents and interests fit the needs of the job).”

# Answers to Tough Interview Questions:

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You may think that the tension at the job interview is all yours. Not true. Interviewers know they must choose people who will do well on the job, or their superiors will label them incompetent. If the interviewer is also the boss, he/she must choose the proper applicant or later struggle with an unsatisfactory employee.

Interviewers tend to use certain questions to relieve their anxieties about whether you will do the job competently and whether you have the necessary temperament-stability, flexibility, dependability, etc. – to fit into the work team.

When you relieve the interviewer of these worries, he/she relaxes. At last, here is someone he/she can safely choose for the job! “Most jobs are filled by people who meet only some of the job’s specifications,” says employment specialist Richard K. Irish, author of Go Hire Yourself an Employer, Anchor Press/Doubleday. But that successful candidate has made the interviewer safe. “Yes, this person can handle the job well.”

While many questions are generally asked in an interview, experts have compiled the following list of those questions most frequently heard in almost all interview sessions. Some suggested answers are given as a guide, but practice framing answers in your own words so your replies will be specifically your own and will project competence.

1. **TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF** – This request is generally followed by a shocked silence as you race your mental motor thinking of something to say. The question is really asking – “Are you well adjusted, able to work well with others?” “Would you be an asset to us, a cost effective employee?” So don’t pour out your whole biography – just give enough information to reassure the interviewer that you will fit well and the reasons that you believe your skills, characteristics, and background would make you the ideal candidate.
2. **WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS ON SALARY?** – The key here is to understand that if the salary is not already openly quoted, the company still has an approximate salary range in mind. There are three ways you can talk about salary. You can tell them salary is negotiable. Another good approach is to ask, “Will you discuss the salary you had in mind?” or “What would you pay someone with my skills and education?” This information will allow you to compare the salary quoted to what you think your time is worth. The third approach is to conduct research on market data for occupation salary ranges. The internet (e.g. [www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com)) can give the current salary median in your geographical area. Go to the interview with the hardcopy from this website. If pressed, you can discuss the “results of your research” by quoting the median and your source for the data.

3. **WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD LIKE TO WORK FOR OUR COMPANY?** – This question is almost equivalent to the personal question: “Honey do you love me?” Everyone wants to feel cared about or chosen, and the employer is no exception. The usual answer to the question is: “I am looking for a job,” which is saying that your only interest in the company is that the company has something that you want – a job opportunity – but it does not make them feel as though you care about them. The truth is that when most individuals look for a job, they are more interested in getting a job than being particular about where they work. They only want to be hired “some place.” One of the most important things to do before you go to an interview, or ask for one, is to find out all you can about the company. This information is available in the business section of your library, on the Internet, or through the Chamber of Commerce. Remember: **Research the company.**
4. **ARE YOU WILLING TO GO WHERE THE COMPANY SENDS YOU?** – Most people who live in our Valley have chosen to live here and do not want to leave. Remember, though, that it is difficult to predict what you will be doing on a job in advance. A company that needs flexibility in its staff may not consider someone who cannot or will not move. You have to make the decision here as to whether the job or your city is more important to you. If the move is not imminent, and a future possibility is being discussed, a good answer might be, “I would certainly be willing to consider it at the time a firm offer is made.”
5. **WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF WORKING AT IN THREE TO FIVE YEARS?** - This really means: “If I hire you, are you likely to stay for a while?” Although questions about marriage, babies, childcare are illegal, if you have completed your family or have good childcare arrangements lined up, strengthen your appeal by volunteering information. You reply that you know you will stay and grow with the job because . . . Most career experts warn against naming a specific future job you hope to hold, lest it mark you as too narrow or inflexible. Indicate that you are mature and realistic in your thinking by discussing areas within this company where you can grow based on your expertise and contributions. If you dream of becoming a state assemblywoman or of opening your own business, don’t mention it here. This question also involves showing that you are motivated, and have goals and aspirations for continuing to learn, increased productivity, and future behavior that will benefit the company.
6. **WHAT ARE YOUR MAJOR STRENGTHS?** - This really means: “Tell me how your abilities fit what is needed for this job.” Remember employers hire people, not just typists or technicians. Here is where you state, convincingly, the qualities and characteristics you have learned you possess. Give at least three. Perhaps you are quick to learn - handle responsibility well – and have good common sense. Moreover, here is another opportunity to mention your maturity as the asset it is. Give an example of what you mean by maturity. Your experience in weighing the pros and cons in making decisions? Your ability to find a fresh approach in problem solving? Your awareness of yourself as the cost-effective employee who would fill the employer’s needs? If you know the job you are applying for requires using initiative, and you know you have plenty, tell the interviewer and give an example.
7. **WE HAVE MANY QUALIFIED APPLICANTS. WHY DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD HIRE YOU FOR THIS JOB?** - This is tough because almost everybody says the same thing: “Because I



think I can do the job.” The words being accompanied by a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. One of the best approaches here is to convey that you are not in a position to evaluate the other candidates, so you cannot give answers to their qualifications. However, on your own behalf, you can say that you believe that your background, experience, and interest in the job equip you to handle the work well. Tell them about the specific skills you possess to meet their needs and make you a qualified candidate. It is important to say, “I believe..” because the truth is you won’t actually know until you do the job how well you can do it. Remember that they can argue facts, but they will not argue with your beliefs. If you say you believe you can do the work, you are being believably honest.

8. **HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING FOR A YOUNGER (OR OLDER) SUPERVISOR?** - Isn’t it amazing that supervisors are people too? Your concern, of course, is that you do the best possible job for the company. The supervisor is there to help, and age is not a criterion of ability to do this. Remember, any bias you may express relating to age, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc., does not belong in the workplace, and will surely count you out as a candidate for the job.
9. **WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF...?** – This deals with an imagined situation that tests your knowledge of the job, or your judgment. Remember that the quality of the solution is not nearly as important as the attitude used to deal with the question. A calm approach is the best bet – no push statements with answers like: “Well, I would do this...” It is far better to cushion your statements with answers like: “One of the things I might consider would be...”, and then give your answer. If you commit yourself to a process of what you would do, and it is not the one they would like to consider, you are in an awkward position. A still safer response would be to consider for a moment, and then ask: “What is your policy?”
10. **WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?** - If there are problems or real concerns about your last employment, deal with this even before the interview. When the question is actually asked it is important that, whatever the situation is, the answer does not reflect badly about your last company. The interviewer’s feelings are that if you speak badly about your last company, you will speak badly about the next one that hires you. One of the best methods here is to be sure that your reply is always given in a calm, comfortable way, and in a voice without tension. Having practiced this situation in a mock interview setting, you will be able to respond in a poised manner. Keep in mind many employers only give your dates of employment and answer whether you would be considered for re-hire.